

Message Text

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ACTION MC-02

INFO OCT-01 EA-06 ISO-00 PM-03 CIAE-00 INR-05 NSAE-00

RSC-01 DODE-00 EB-04 COME-00 TRSE-00 OMB-01 DRC-01

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R 151126Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7618

INFO AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 16474

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI, TH, BM, LA

SUBJ: HAND GUN EXPORTS TO THAILAND

REF: STATE 218378

1. JUDGING FROM IMPORT STATISTICS, THAILAND PURCHASES 50 TO 70 PERCENT OF ALL ITS IMPORTED HAND GUNS FROM THE UNITED STATES. THESE SAME FIGURES SHOW THAT THE MAJORITY OF HAND GUN IMPORTS FROM THE UNITED STATES ARE 9MM PISTOLS, I.E. 38 CALIBER WEAPONS. REPRESENTATIVE STATISTICS SHOW THE FOLLOWING IMPORTATION TREND:

	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973
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9MM PISTOL FROM USA	12,417	16,878	16,331	13,576	10,895
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TOTAL PISTOLS FROM USA	21,537	25,745	25,411	19,337	16,558
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TOTAL PISTOL IMPORTS	32,907	36,301	33,627	29,504	31,542
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2. THE SMITH WESSON 38 CALIBER REVOLVER IS THE STANDARD HAND GUN OF THE THAI NATIONAL POLICE DEPARTMENT. OUR IMPORT FIGURES, HOWEVER, DO NOT TELL WHETHER THE GOVERNMENT OR A PRIVATE ENTREPRENEUR WAS THE IMPORTER.

3. THAILAND HAS NO MANUFACTURING CAPACITY IN HAND GUNS AND MUST IMPORT ALL HER NEEDS. IMPORTS THUS DIRECTLY REFLECT DEMAND WHICH HAS APPARENTLY FALLEN SINCE THE 1970 HIGH. A SUDDEN
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JUMP IN IMPORTS IN 1974 COULD BE RELATED TO A NUMBER OF FACTORS

BOTH WITHIN THAILAND AND IN HER NEIGHBORING STATES. THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL SITUATION IN THAILAND SINCE THE OCTOBER 1973 CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN ONE WHICH CERTAIN THAI ELEMENTS DESCRIBE AS LACKING IN "LAW AND ORDER."

4. ASSASSINATION FOR POLITICAL OR BUSINESS PURPOSES IN THAILAND IS NOT UNCOMMON AND THE HAND GUN PLAYS ITS ROLE. IN PREPARATION FOR THE COMING ELECTIONS, AND IN RESPONSE TO THE IDEA THAT THAILAND IS AWASH IN WEAPONS, PARTICULARLY THOSE SMUGGLED IN FROM THE INDOCHINA WAR ZONE, SOMKIT SISANGKHOM, FORMER SOCIAL DEMOCRAT PARTY PARLIAMENTARIAN AND PRESENTLY AN APPOINTED MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, HAS INTRODUCED LEGISLATION TO STRENGTHEN GUN REGISTRATION PROCEDURES AND PAY A BOUNTY ON UNREGISTERED WEAPONS TURNED IN TO THE GOVERNMENT IN AN ATTEMPT TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF WEAPONS IN PRIVATE HANDS. SOMKIT'S BILL HOWEVER, IS PRIMARILY FOCUSED ON RIFLES, NOT HAND GUNS. IF THERE IS A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF ASSASSINATIONS DURING THE COMING ELECTIONS, THE PUBLIC AND PRESS MIGHT CALL FOR TIGHTENING REGISTRATION REGULATIONS.

5. RECOMMENDATION: THE AVAILABILITY OF HAND GUNS MAY HAVE A REAL AND PUBLIC IMPACT ON THE APPROACHING THAI ELECTIONS. THERE IS SOME DANGER IN THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENT FOR CRITICISM OF THE AMERICAN SOURCE OF THE MAJORITY OF THE HANDGUNS. WITHOUT AN EXPRESSION OF CONCERN FROM THE THAI GOVERNMENT, HOWEVER, THE MISSION IS RELUCTANT TO RECOMMEND RESTRICTIONS AT THIS TIME.

6. WE WILL CONTINUE TO WATCH THE LEVEL OF IMPORTS, HOWEVER, AND SOLICIT RTG VIEWS, WE WILL ADVISE IF WE BELIEVE FURTHER ACTION ON OUR PART IS REQUIRED.
MASTERS

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